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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9844  
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 3083  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0898  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0772  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 1348  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
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SUBJECT: BERDIMUHAMEDOV TELLS OFFICIALS TO CLEAN UP THE  
CITY AND GET RID OF THE SATELLITE DISHES

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: At an impromptu Cabinet of Ministers meeting held during an Iranian trade show on November 30, President Berdimuhamedov was seemingly inspired by a three-dimensional satellite map of Ashgabat to issue several directives primarily based on the city's aesthetic shortcomings. Noting that satellite dishes and cigarette butts are ugly, President Berdimuhamedov proposed that the Ministry of Communications install a giant satellite dish and disseminate programming to residents via cable, and instructed the Ministry of Internal Affairs to enforce the ban on smoking in public. Berdimuhamedov also instructed Ashgabat Mayor Deryageldi Orazov to upgrade the electrical system, install an improved water drainage system, and broaden city streets. Pointing out the quantity of leaves on the streets, the president directed Orazov to keep the city streets cleaner and ordered that architects include car parks and playgrounds in plans for new apartment buildings. Berdimuhamedov then took aim at his deputies, stating that they have not updated their way of thinking enough after having traveled abroad. END SUMMARY.

GET RID OF THE SATELLITE DISHES

13. (U) While viewing a three-dimensional satellite map of Ashgabat during a visit to an Iranian trade show at the Exhibition Palace November 30, President Berdimuhamedov held an impromptu Cabinet of Ministers meeting. Using the map as a visual reminder of where he had seen things that had irritated him during his frequent inspections of the city, Berdimuhamedov criticized Ashgabat City Mayor Deryageldi Orazov and various ministers for what he viewed as shortcomings in Ashgabat's aesthetic qualities. In particular, noting that the satellite farms adorning the rooftops of nearly every apartment building in Ashgabat are ugly, Berdimuhamedov instructed Minister of Communications Resulberdi Hojagurbanov to remove satellite dishes. Instead, Berdimuhamedov said, the government should install a single powerful dish, from which residents will receive satellite television service via cables. (COMMENT: Post IMO believes

that resorting to a single "powerful" dish to provide cable to the entire city would be technically impossible. Local cable infrastructure is so woefully inadequate that service would quickly deteriorate the farther one gets from the dish.

In addition, you need multiple dishes pointed at several satellites to pull in the various channels now commonly viewed. END NOTE.) Siemens reportedly is actively encouraging this project in order to win what would be a significant contract.

...AND CLEAN UP THE CITY

14. (U) Berdimuhamedov directed Mayor Orazov to improve Ashgabat's electrical grid to avoid brownouts during inclement weather. Noting that whole streets had problems with standing water during some recent rainstorms, Berdimuhamedov also told Orazov to install an improved drainage system. Berdimuhamedov stated that Ashgabat should broaden streets to lessen traffic jams, even if it means kicking people out of their homes temporarily, though he added that the displaced residents should be offered housing once the new construction was completed. (NOTE: It takes two or three years to build new housing. In the meantime, residents will be responsible for finding a place to live, in a city that has a shortage of housing of any quality. END NOTE.) The president also demanded that every newly built apartment block should be provided with separate car parks and playgrounds from now on.

SMOKING, ANOTHER ASSAULT ON THE EYES

15. (U) Berdimuhamedov also directed the Ministry of Internal Affairs to take necessary measures to enforce the ban on

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smoking in public places. "Once cannot go around without seeing cigarette stubs everywhere in the city. Streets are full of smokers. This problem continues because some senior officials are themselves smokers. This should not be the case," the president said. The president also criticized the "old mentality" of his deputies. "You are thinking in old ways despite the fact that you have been sent abroad several times to learn."

16. (SBU) COMMENT: There is more than meets the eye to Berdimuhamedov's complaints about Ashgabat. Post has already noted Berdimuhamedov's tendency to place importance on appearances. He is not a technical person and, while he cannot give technical advice, he wants the marble city to function as -- as well as to look like -- a modern city. Most importantly, he genuinely seems to care about making the country more efficient and comfortable.

17. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: That being said, however, the president may need to compromise on the satellite dishes. Turkmenistan's people have learned to compensate for dimly boring domestic television fare by depending on foreign satellite television for entertainment and the "real" (read Russian) news. Although a law against satellite dishes has been on the books for years, this was one law that even former President Niyazov never seriously sought to enforce. Ashgabat's citizens will not easily sign on to the president's new plan, unless they can be convinced that eliminating their satellites will not result in the loss of any of their current programming options. END COMMENT.  
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